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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001852

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [KDEM](#)

SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: KRG ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN SNAPSHOTS FROM
SULAIMANIYAH

REF: BAGHDAD 1538

Classified By: Regional Coordinator Lucy Tamlyn for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Summary: There is anecdotal evidence that the Change List campaign, headed by Nawshirwan Mustfafa, is gaining in popularity in Sulaimaniyah, especially among younger voters (Ref A). Even the leadership of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party is apparently beginning to admit privately that their campaign might be in some trouble. Given its resources and the power of patronage, the PUK must still be considered the favorite at this point. End Summary.

The PUK Poster Parade Finally Kicks Into Gear

¶2. (C) Driving into Sulaimaniyah from Erbil on June 29, RRTOff found himself in the worst traffic jam he had ever encountered in this perennially congested city of over one million people. It turned out that the traffic jam was caused by motorists driving around the city carrying campaign flags, and the vast majority of the flags in evidence were those of the Change List. According to Sulaimaniyah Governor Dana Majed, the PUK is paying young people \$25 to carry their flags, and even paid \$1,000 for permission to plaster buses with their campaign material. But despite these financial inducements, the cars carrying the banners of Change greatly outnumbered the PUK cars that day.

¶3. (C) During the first week of the campaign, election posters appeared on walls and lamp posts throughout the PUK-controlled city. At that time, RRTOff saw many more posters for Change than for the PUK. While some Change posters showed the face of Nawshirwan, most of them featured the symbol of the Change List, a single white burning candle on a dark blue background, with the word "Change" underneath the candle. According to Dr. Shaho Saeed, the official spokesman for the Change List, the candle was very deliberately chosen and represents the same values as the torch in the Status of Liberty. This picture of a lighted candle is in sharp contrast with PUK posters, which feature the solemn visage of Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, standing cross-armed and looking off at an angle.

¶4. (C) A week later the scene had completely shifted: Sulaimaniyah was covered in PUK posters. Many of the new posters still featured Barham, but now he was smiling and giving the thumbs up. Another poster presented Barham and a group of PUK leaders against the backdrop of an American C-130, with the letters "US" prominently highlighted on the aircraft. (Comment: Some accuse the PUK of trying to give the impression that the USG supports the PUK in this election. End Comment.)

A Sampling of Opinion on the Street

15. (SBU) The EU-funded Independent Media Center (IMC) provides training and consulting to journalists and to media organizations in the Kurdistan Region. Over a month ago, as part of its training, the IMC sent journalists to talk to people in the street in Sulaimaniyah. These included four journalists from PUK and KDP-controlled media and two from independent newspapers. The reporters asked people about their expectations for the elections, what issues they thought were most important, and for whom they planned to vote.

16. (C) The reporter for the PUK-controlled Kurdsat cable TV network spoke to 75 people. Of these, only 20 said they would vote for the joint KDP-PUK list; 15 had not yet made up their minds, five planned to stay at home and not vote, and 35 said they would vote for Change. The two most important issues among those polled were unemployment among younger people, and justice. The results obtained by the other five correspondents mirrored those of the Kurdsat reporter. This was not the outcome these reporters had anticipated. The IMC trainer described the reaction of some in the group as "horrified." (Note: This was not an election poll according to industry standards, nor can it be interpreted as statistically accurate. Reftel contains results of the best polling Post has seen. End Note).

More Campaign Snapshots

* Missing Section 002 *
